

Message Text

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR, CE
SUBJECT: GSL REQUEST FOR TWO BELL CIVILIAN MODEL HELICOPTERS

1. I WAS SUMMONED BY THE SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS ON FEBRUARY 24, AT THE SPECIFIC REQUEST OF PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE. SECRETARY W.T. JAYASINGHE SAID THE MATTER RELATED TO THE GSL'S INTEREST IN ACQUIRING TWO TWIN-ENGINE BELL HELICOPTERS, MODEL 212 TWIN 675, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, AND ON A GIFT BASIS.

2. THE BACKGROUND WAS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD PLANNED TO BUY TWO SUCH HELICOPTERS, AND IN FACT HAD SOUGHT BIDS FROM TWO SUCH HELICOPTERS, AND IN FACT HAD SOUGHT BIDS FROM A NUMBER OF SOURCES (WE SO REPORTED IN BOTH COMMERCE AND DEFENCE CHANNELS AT THE TIME). THE BELL BID HAD BEEN THE MOST ATTRACTIVE FROM ALL STANDPOINTS, AND CAME TO APPROXIMATELY \$2.75 MILLION. ALTHOUGH THE HELICOPTERS WOULD BE ASSIGNED TO THE AIR FORCE AND FLOWN BY AIR FORCE PERSONNEL, THEY WOULD BE IN A CIVILIAN CONFIGURATION AND WOULD BE USED BOTH FOR COMMERCIAL CHARTERS (AS THE AIR FORCE NOW DOES WITH SINGLE ENGINE CRAFT) AND FOR THE TRAVEL OF GOVERNMENTAL VIPS, PRINCIPALLY THE PRIME MINISTER AND VISITING HEADS OF STATE. THE PM WILL BE DOING A GREAT DEAL OF

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INTERNAL TRAVELING IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS AND IS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE PERSONAL SAFETY FACTOR IN EMPLOYING THE SINGLE ENGINE HELICOPTERS NOW OWNED BY THE AIR FORCE.

3. THE PROBLEM OF A GIFT ARISES BECAUSE THE FUNDS FOR THE PURCHASE OF THE TWO HELICOPTERS WERE INADVERTENTLY OMITTED FROM THE BUDGET PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL STATE

ASSEMBLY BY THE FINANCE MINISTER IN NOVEMBER, AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS JUST DISCOVERED THIS FACT. NOT ONLY WOULD THE GOVERNMENT BE LOATH TO GO IN FOR A SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION ON THE EVE OF A N ELECTION, A COURSE OF ACTION WHICH WOULD DRAW WIDE PUBLIC ATTENTION TO ITS MISCALCULATION, BUT, HAVING PROROGUED THE ASSEMBLY UNTIL THE VERY EVE OF THE ELECTION, IT CANNOT DO SO. ACCORDINGLY, THE PRIME MINISTER EARNESTLY HOPED THAT THE USG COULD HELP HER GOVERNMENT OUT IN THIS MOMENT OF PARTICULAR NEED (DOUBTLESS RECALLING OUR SIMILAR ASSISTANCE A THE TIME OF THE 1971 INSURGENCY). I REPLIED THA I WOULD PASS THE REQUEST ON TO MY GOVERNMENT ON AN URGENT BASIS.

4. COMMENT: I REALIZE FULL WELL THE PROBLEM OF A SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR SUCH A FIFT, IN THE EVENT THE DEPARTMENT WERE TO DECIDE THAT A GESTURE OF THIS SORT WOULD BE POLITICALLY DESIRABLE. I CAN ONLY POINT OUT THE OBVIOUS, THAT THE FURNISHING OF THESE TWO, OR EVEN ONE, HELICOPTERS WOULD GENERAGE A GREAT DEAL OF GOOD WILL ON THE PART OF THE PRIME MINISTER, RECOGNIZING AS SHE WOULD THAT THE MATTER ESSENTIALLY AMOUNTS TO CONSIDERATION FOR HER OWN PERSONAL SAFETY, IN WHAT WILL BE A VERY BUSY PERIOD FOR HER. AND SHOULD SHE NOT RETAIN THE HEAD OF GOVERNMENT POSITION, THE HELICOPTERS WOULD BE EQUALLY USED AND APPRECIATED BY A SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT. IN ANY EVENT, I WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING EARLY ADVICE ON HOW TO RESPOND.

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